

Dairy Management

WHAT ABOUT FEEDING WHEAT GRAIN?

The time to feed wheat as a forage to our cattle may not come until next spring when we may have to stretch short supplies of silage and hay with a stand of winter forages such as wheat, and possibly some vetch mixed in.

However, now is a good time to consider feeding some wheat grain. Old-timers warn us against doing this directly from the field after the combine. There's no good research data to support or dispute this. Economic reasons should motivate us, however, to look at wheat as a bargain feed alternative at this time of year when the wheat market is usually depressed. If wheat is less costly than corn, barley and soybean oilmeal in relative terms, then formulating a modified dairy cattle ration that includes wheat grain should provide new profits.

Wheat has about 12 to 14 percent protein (as fed), compared to corn, which has only 9 percent, and barley, which has 12 percent. Since protein is the expensive part of the dairy feed ration, the higher protein content of wheat makes it a valuable feed alternative to corn or even barley. Just how valuable is a matter of comparative prices and a little calculation, since wheat values can be determined from those of the corn and protein supplement replaced.

As a rule of thumb, 100 pounds of wheat will replace, nutritionally, 90 pounds of corn plus 10 pounds of soybean oilmeal. Thus, if 90 pounds of corn cost \$3.12 at \$1.75 per bushel, and if 10 pounds of soybean oilmeal cost \$.90 at \$180 per ton, then the total cost equivalent for 100 pounds of wheat will be \$4.02, or \$2.41 per bushel.

This is the "opportunity price" for using wheat in your dairy ration in place of corn and soybean oil-

meal. If the prices for corn and soybean oilmeal quoted here are near the prices you pay, then wheat at less than \$2.41 per bushel will be a bargain. If your prices are different, just substitute them in the above calculation to arrive at your wheat opportunity price.

Cost aside, how nutritional is wheat grain as a dairy feed? Very good, but a few precautions are necessary. The protein in wheat is called gluten and tends to act like chewing gum! Want to have fun? Ever see your cows blow bubble gum? Feed them straight wheat!! No, really, don't. The experience in our Delaware Agricultural Experiment Station dairy herd is that 30 percent is a maximum limit for any kind of wheat in our grain mixture. Some dairymen have safely used 40 percent before palatability of the grain mix was reduced because of the pasty nature of wheat gluten.

Limit separate wheat feeding to 12 to 15 pounds per cow per day. If you do this, no sticky masses should accumulate in the cow's rumen to cause digestive upsets. Wheat grain can also be topdressed onto silage or even added to forages when ensiling at a rate of 200 pounds per ton. Fine grinding of wheat should be avoided because it will aggravate the pastiness problem and reduce palatability. Wheat is better rolled, coarsely ground, or fed whole to heifers and calves. Change to wheat feeding gradually over a 2-week period to give the rumen bacteria time to adjust. If you do this, the cows won't go off feed.

When soybean oilmeal or other protein supplements cost more than \$180 per ton, wheat becomes more interesting economically. With a little skill in feeding and some good cow sense, wheat can be a profit maker or your dairy farm right now.

Early Corn Harvest Could Drop Prices

MINNEAPOLIS — Look for the seasonal low in corn prices to come in August, 20 to 40 days earlier than normal, says Leroy Louwagie of Ag Marketing Services, Inc., Mankato, MN.

"Expect corn prices to hit their

low early because the harvest is seasonally ahead of schedule," Louwagie told participants in a marketing seminar held during the National Corn Growers Association's Corn Classic held in Minneapolis recently.

Louwagie anticipates price improvement in the corn industry and other commodities in the near future. "Approximately every 25 years a major low is established in corn prices," Louwagie said. "This was true in 1961 and again in 1986. Look for corn and other grain prices to move higher into 1988, especially as the elections approach."

"Most of agriculture suffers from low markets every 50-55 years, led by four to five years of agricultural deflation," added Louwagie. "It appears we are nearing an upturn in many farm community markets, and deflation has reached the bottom."

A strong inverse relationship between the stock market and commodity markets was noted by Louwagie. "When the stock market begins to come down, watch for agricultural commodities to go up in value."

Appearing on the seminar program with Louwagie was John Ireland of the Chicago Board of Trade.

He pointed out corn marketing opportunities have existed in the past seven months when the market fluctuated from \$1.40 to \$2.00 per bushel.

Ireland encouraged attendees to develop a marketing plan, know your cost of production and to consider various marketing alternatives to maximize corn profits.

Economist Says Farm Income, Debt Reduction Largest Ever

MINNEAPOLIS — Agriculture has "turned the corner" as farm income, debt reduction and cuts in expenses are currently at record levels, according to Dr. John Marten, staff economist for Farm Journal magazine.

In remarks to attendees of the National Corn Growers Association's recent Corn Classic, Marten stated that U.S. agriculture now has the largest positive cash flow in history, plus record highs in net income and cash income.

He also emphasized farm debts and expenses have been slashed by record amounts. Farmers are reducing their debts by \$15 billion per year, according to Marten.

"Revised USDA figures show net farm income in 1986 was \$38 billion, and is projected to be in the \$40-\$44 billion range in 1987," added Marten.

He pointed out U.S. grain exports have strengthened in 1987, and he forecasts a 10 percent increase in grain exports for the year.

Several factors are responsible for the increase in exports, Marten said. "A weaker U.S. dollar and worldwide increase in grain usage have picked up demand for U.S. grains."

"Since 1970, we are increasing by one billion bushels per year the amount of grain the world uses," Marten said. "Five years from now, we will have a six billion bushel increase in world grain use."

Marten concluded his remarks by forecasting a 7.15 billion bushel U.S. corn crop in 1987, with yields bushels per acre and an average price of \$1.85 per bushel.

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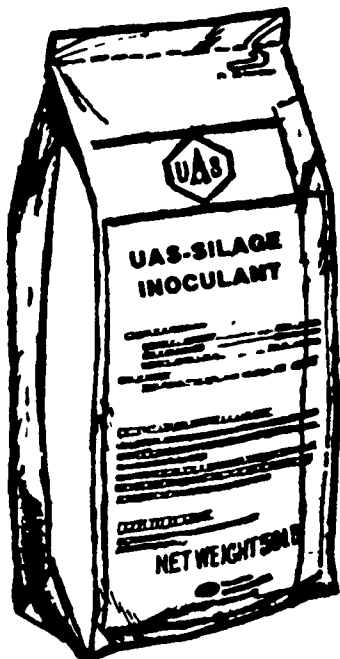
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